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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 2007

In Today's Papers

Court Annuls Turkish Presidential Election, AKP Calls for Polls on June 24

All papers report Turkey's Constitutional Court declared the first round of the presidential poll invalid and that Prime Minister Erdogan subsequently proposed an early general election be held on June 24 or July 1. The Constitutional Court ruled not enough parliamentarians were present when the first round of the presidential vote was held in the 550-seat assembly. Erdogan said yesterday "The parliamentary system has been blocked; we are urgently going to the people," proposing an early general election be held "on June 24 or July 1." Erdogan also said his ruling AKP wants the Turkish people, not parliament, to elect the president. He said AKP also suggests reducing the term of parliament to four years from the current five years.

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak claims the government will hold a referendum on a package of constitutional amendments if the opposition declines to support the changes. Opposition Anavatan Party leader Erkan Mumcu pledged unconditional support for constitutional reforms. The main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal, however, opposed Erdogan's proposal for electing the president in general elections, saying such an implementation will pave the way for the introduction of a "semi-sultanate" in Turkey.

On Wednesday morning, AKP submitted a bill to the parliament on holding parliamentary elections on June 24. AKP MP Salih Kapusuz said his party will also send to parliament today a proposal for having the president elected for a five-year term, renewable after another five years, directly by voters and not by the parliament.

Editorial Commentary

Mehmet Yilmaz writes in the mainstream daily Hurriyet: "One of the main obstacles against resolving the current political crisis stems from the fact that Turkey does not have a political party which can address the demands of millions who are rallying against the

government. The rallies are organized by NGOs as opposed to a political party because we have no party one that can attract the attention of the masses. Let's be clear about the main opposition party. CHP is doomed to lose elections as long as Baykal remains the leader. Neither supporters of CHP nor the center right voters concerned about the rise of the Islamists support Baykal. All of this, I hope, gives a message to Baykal: leave your seat to an emerging and promising young leader right now if you really want to prevent a recurrence of the current political situation after the elections."

Hincal Uluc writes in the mainstream daily Sabah: "Secular Turkey must find its political leader as soon as possible. Otherwise, those impressive numbers at the street demonstrations will not be converted into votes. If the supporters of secularism go through the elections without proper leadership, they will end up presenting an election gift to the Islamist AKP."

Mustafa Unal comments in the intellectual Islamist-oriented Zaman: "The [April 27] military warning cast a shadow on the court decision, and opposition parties paved the way for this. Regardless of point of view, it is certain this will be a litmus test for Turkish democracy. One side represents supporters of democracy -- wounded due to the military warning -- and the other side represents a group who support 'less democracy' to put it mildly. The problem comes not only from the threat of the military acting against the people's will but also from some politicians who seek a coup. Nevertheless, Turkey should not live with pessimistic scenarios. Turkey is capable of overcoming this turbulence as well. The solution is very clear: immediate elections and an immediate call to hear the people's will."

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May Day Riots Paralyze Istanbul

All papers report Turkish riot police detained more than 900 demonstrators while at least 30 protestors were injured in Istanbul on Tuesday as they tried to march to Taksim Square in the heart of the city. Police fired tear gas and water canons on some groups trying to access Taksim and detained several people. Forty-one schools were shut down in the area for the day in anticipation of turmoil. Public transport was paralyzed in the city as the authorities blocked roads, cancelled ferry services and closed metro stations. The Istanbul stock exchange began trading later than usual because of the traffic gridlock. Organizers later complained at a press conference that a large number of people were taken into custody and treated roughly. People are treated like terrorists, says liberal Radikal under a page-one headline, "Police terror for the people of Istanbul," adding the city "ground to a halt because of rigid measures taken by the police." Istanbul Governor and police chief were strongly criticized for shutting down parts of the city and the use of excessive force by riot police.

Minister Aydin to Represent Turkey at Iraq Summit

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Zaman and others report Turkey will be represented by State Minister Mehmet Aydin at the May 3-4 expanded Iraq neighbors conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, due to the domestic political developments in Turkey preventing Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul to participate. At Sharm al-Sheikh, Turkey is expected to express its concerns over Kirkuk and the PKK.

Turkish University to Host Turkey-Armenia Congress

Mainstream Hurriyet reports a group of Middle East Technical University (METU) students in Ankara will hold a congress, "Turkish Universities' Approach to Turkey-Armenia Ties," from May 4-6. METU students will explain their projects to reduce strain between the two countries at the congress which will not discuss Armenian genocide allegations.

US 2006 Country Reports on Terrorism

Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report the US State Department 2006 Country Reports on Terrorism described the PKK as the "most prominent among terrorist groups in Turkey." "The PKK maintained an active presence in Greek Cyprus and reportedly used the island as both a fundraising and transit point. Among Kurdish-origin Turkish settlers in the north, the PKK

reportedly enjoys significant support," papers cite the report. Liberal Radikal says the report contains criticism of Turkey and Prime Minister Erdogan for its continued failure to act against Yasin al-Qadi, a Saudi terrorist financier included in the UN list.

TV Highlights
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- A rally in support of secularism will be held May 5 in the Aegean city of Manisa.
- A delegation headed by the Kurdish party DTP leader Ahmet Turk has met with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in Dokan town in northern Iraq to discuss a solution to the PKK problem through dialogue.
- AKP MP from Konya Ibrahim Hakki Askar has resigned from his party, dropping the number of the ruling party seats in parliament to 352.
- A Turkish military helicopter crashed on Tuesday while trying to make an emergency landing north of Diyarbakir, injuring both pilots.

International News

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- Millions of people participated in May Day demonstrations around the world yesterday on international Labor Day, May 1.
- A report on the state of media freedom released by Freedom House rates Turkey under "partly free" countries, noting a dramatic rise in legal harassment was seen in the country where almost 300 journalists and writers were prosecuted for "insulting Turkishness" under Article 301.
- Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister George Lillikas has rejected the proposal of Turkish Cypriot "Foreign Minister" Turgay Avci for meeting in a third country.
- Iraqi officials said they have received reports that Abu Eyyub al-Masri, the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, was killed by Sunni tribesmen.

WILSON